



"I will pour out my Spirit upon all...

and your young shall see visions

and your old shall dream dreams."

--Acts 2:17

Voices & Visions

A publication of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

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Odessa Woolfolk: A Life of Unselfish Service

By Joyce Hollyday



Odessa Woolfolk was a young high school teacher in the early 1960s, when the Civil Rights Movement was heating up in the South. In 1963, when the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) asked school children to march in Birmingham, many teachers were afraid to support them. People had been fired from their jobs and suffered other retaliations for speaking out or participating in the Movement. Odessa told her students the day before a large march that whether they took part in it depended on what their parents said about it. Then she added, "But I'll give you an F if you show up in my government class tomorrow."

The Birmingham campaign was a turning point in the Movement. Pictures of fire hoses being turned on the children, and police dogs attacking them, flashed across the news. "It was the ultimate in brutality," says Odessa. "Birmingham is permanently welded in the conscience of America and the world."

Birmingham was a natural choice to host a Civil Rights museum. In 1986, then-Mayor Richard Arrington Jr. appointed a task force to oversee its planning and development. He asked Odessa Woolfolk to chair this important committee. Just as Birmingham was a natural choice for a museum, Odessa was the obvious choice to lead the effort to create one. Her professional and research career has spanned concerns including urban development and history, economic opportunity, housing, so-

cial services, education, race relations, and community organizations. For 10 years, she directed the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Center for Urban Affairs.

Odessa has lived a lifetime of public service and community involvement, winning honors that include the 1985 Birmingham Career Woman of the Year, the 1991 Outstanding Alabama Civic Leader, and the 1997 Humanitarian Award from the Alabama Humanities Foundation. In 1993, upon her retirement from UAB, the university established the Odessa Woolfolk Presidential Community Service Award, and in October 1994, the Mayor and City Council of Birmingham inducted her into the Gallery of Distinguished Citizens.

Odessa credits three influences for her commitment to service: her family's values; her teachers in high school; and her professors at Talladega College. "The philosophy of nonviolence and progressive activism, along with the responsibility of service, were values that were pounded into us at Talladega," she says. She was moved that some of the faculty got arrested going into segregated facilities, refusing to believe that they should be allowed to go where their students couldn't. Odessa also spent some summer sessions at the Race Relations Institute at Fisk University, where she says she learned the nature of racial prejudice and turned her career path from mathematics to history, political science, and economics.

Talladega chapel services exposed her to a variety of thinkers and activists, people who convinced her that one person can make a difference in the world. She learned about the American Missionary Association and the Congregationalists who came to the South to establish schools, and she became involved in the United Church of Christ. First Congregational Christian Church, UCC, in Birmingham—which she now serves as Moderator—was active at the time fighting against police brutality. The church also hosted meetings between Dr. Martin Luther King and local Civil Rights leaders, and was under police surveillance because of holding biracial meetings, illegal at that time.

(continued on page 4)



“Grace to you, and peace ...”

A Letter from the Conference Minister

Dear Friends,

Over the last several months, these words of Paul to the church in Corinth have been in my mind: “But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ...struck down, but not destroyed...” (2 Corinthians 4:7-9).

Paul thought of himself as a humble vessel, a clay jar. He was aware of his physical limitations, his lack of verbal eloquence, his shortness of stature. Nonetheless, there was a brilliance that shone through his written words and left an indelible mark on the churches to which he wrote.

Paul was aware that these very churches, particularly the one in Corinth, were themselves “clay jars,” imperfect vessels for the treasure. Imperfect in Corinth because this was a congregation rife with conflict and torn by disputing factions. Yet these imperfections, this “clayness” in Paul’s person and in the congregations he served, did not dim or obscure the treasure, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the redemptive gift of Christ to each of us.

For two months, I, in collaboration with many others, have been engaged in an investigation directed by a Church and Ministry Committee. One of the people involved in the investigation said, “We have met one another in our brokenness.” This process has brought me to reflect on the frailties and limitations of those of us who are called into Christian ministry, and our inadequacy by our very nature to be the “vessels” of this treasure, this Gospel. Further, I am deeply aware of the conflicts and disputes in some churches, and the hurts that have marked so many ministries.

But Paul reminds us that we are, nonetheless, all of us, entrusted with a ministry in the name of Jesus Christ. All of us have been given a treasure to bear. In Paul’s view, our imperfections, our inadequacies for the tasks, merely highlight the fact that this treasure is not ours, but comes to us by the power of God.

As I travel around this Conference, time and again I marvel at the ministries that break forth out of our congregations, in spite of ourselves. Time and again, I see God using us to be bearers of “greater truth and light” in this time, and place. Time and again, I find that those churches that have been able to name their vision, and live toward it, are the ones that have caused this treasure to be more evident and more clear.

And so, in spite of our limitations and our frailties, ministries continue to unfold. The lonely and estranged are greeted with hospitality, the hungry are fed, the sick are nurtured and healed, those who dwell in the shadows have seen the light of justice shine upon them. And, yes, in spite of our limitations and our frailties, God’s glory is revealed.

I am reminded again that the Gospel is not proclaimed faithfully by our excellent programs, our high technology, or our superb resources. It is proclaimed by our openness to the Spirit, our humility in confession, and our awareness that it is not our work, but God’s work, that we do.

Peace,
Timothy C. Downs



CONFERENCE CALENDAR

M A R C H

- 3 **WORLD DAY OF PRAYER**
- 8 **ASH WEDNESDAY**
- 10 - 11 **GA/SC Executive Committee Meeting** (location to be announced)
- 12 **AMISTAD SUNDAY & HEALTH AND WELFARE SUNDAY**
- 14 - 15 **Staff Meeting** (Pilgrim Congregational, Chattanooga, TN)
- 16 **Covenant for Renewal Meeting** (Pilgrim Congregational, Chattanooga, TN)
- 17 - 18 **Lay Theology Education Consultation** (Central Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA)
- 23 **Annual Meeting Planning Committee Meeting** (Community Congregational, Montgomery, AL)
- 25 **AL/TN Leadership Training** (United Church of Huntsville, Huntsville, AL)
- 30 **AL/TN Church & Ministry Committee Meeting** (location to be announced)
- 31 - 1 **Board of Directors Meeting** (Congregational Christian Church, Lanett, AL)

A P R I L

- 2 **ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING ALL-CHURCH OFFERING**
- 5 **Disaster Assistance Relief Team (DART) Meeting** (Conference office, Atlanta, GA)
- 16 **PALM/PASSION SUNDAY**
- 20 **MAUNDY THURSDAY**
- 21 **GOOD FRIDAY** (Conference office closed)
- 23 **EASTER SUNDAY**
- 30 **ECOJUSTICE SABBATH & PACIFIC ISLANDER AND ASIAN AMERICAN SUNDAY**



Voices & Visions

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In November 1992, the Civil Rights Institute opened in Birmingham. The name "Institute" was chosen intentionally. "We don't want to be just a museum," Odessa says. "The past is a case study, informing our ongoing quest for reconciliation. As the country is becoming more multicultural, it is very important that we learn how to understand one another and live together without becoming balkanized. Otherwise, we'll see a resurgence of the discrimination and hatred that come when people aren't connected. The challenge of the Institute is to foster ways of communicating, to create a living community."

On November 14, 1999, the Odessa Woolfolk Gallery was dedicated at the Civil Rights Institute. Former Mayor Richard Arrington Jr. said at the dedication, "Odessa is always ready for a challenge. With passion, she fights for the many causes she believes in, yet always manages to keep the needs of others first and foremost in her heart. She is truly an amazing woman who possesses charm, wisdom, vision, character, stamina, grace, and compassion. It should be no surprise to anyone that the Board of Directors of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute unanimously made the decision to name a gallery in her honor."

Praise for this remarkable woman came unanimously from colleagues, former students, and her pastor Rev. Rodney Franklin—all applauding Odessa as a leader, activist, and bridge builder between races, religions, and political persuasions. Her niece, Carol White, spoke of her "quiet elegance, kindness, and gentle smile" and a disposition that "can melt the ice-cold heart of any opponent."

Odessa is very humble about her accomplishments. She says of her philosophy of life, "I believe what I learned in Sunday school. I must have been the most gullible kid that ever was. When I heard the stories of Jesus—how accepting he was of all people—that made sense to me. It's what you're supposed to do."

People stream to the Civil Rights Institute from across the country and around the world to learn the Birmingham Story and connect it with their own struggles for freedom and justice. Now President Emeritus of the Institute, Odessa hopes that it will continue to be a place of learning, communication, and reconciliation. She also hopes that the church will become more active in reconciliation. "We need to be much more responsive in helping to resolve society's ills and advocate for the suffering," she says. "Jesus taught us there's less to do in the pews than in the community."

Paul Moore, who has served Trinity Congregational UCC in Athens, Ala., suffered yet another stroke and retired in February. The church held a service of recognition to honor his seven years with them.

Our thoughts are with **Wayde Washburn**, pastor of Elder Congregational Christian Church in Dadeville, Ala., whose mother died recently.

We remember **Bruce and Sarah Jayne** of Circular Church in Charleston, whose son is suffering from kidney failure.

Please keep in your prayers these folks from Pleasant Hill who have been ill: **Hal Schoup, Leon Dickinson, Jerry Kummer, and Martha Rabert.**

Rush Memorial Congregational UCC in Atlanta recently suffered vandalism. Please remember Pastor Larry Calbert and the congregation.

Pleasant Hill Community Church, UCC, celebrated its mission partnership with the Cuban Church by welcoming the co-pastors of the Second Baptist Church of Santiago de Cuba, Rev. Perea-Munz and Rev. Laverstoda-Alfonso.



Conference
Celebrations
&
Concerns

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

January 14-15, 2000; Montgomery, Alabama

Reports were offered from the following individuals and Commissions.

The Treasurer

Brad Pruitt reported that, in spite of an anticipated deficit for 1999 of more than \$30,000, we ended up with a deficit in the range of \$5,000, and a strong financial picture for the year 2000. OCWM contributions from our congregations exceeded our expectations, and we were able to cover our deficit out of our reserve fund.

The Board voted to contribute \$20,000 to national OCWM for 1999, which remains above 10 percent of our OCWM receipts from our congregations. We have committed to continue to raise our OCWM giving to the church in its national setting in 2001 and 2002.

Annual Meeting Planning Committee

The Annual Meeting Planning Committee reported that we will highlight programs that feature the Civil Rights history of Montgomery, where the meeting will be held June 16-17. We noted that we will have music woven throughout our proceedings, led by leading musicians of the United Church of Christ. This will be an occasion to celebrate the tremendous success of our newest congregation in the Southeast Conference, Community Congregational United Church of Christ, which at this time has more than 200 members.

Allen Retreat Center Planning Committee

We currently have a balance of more than \$20,000 in the Allen Retreat Center Fund in cash, and additional pledges which we will receive within the next two months.

Disaster Assistance Relief Team (DART)

DART has written a mission statement: *Jesus Christ calls us to help those hurting from disasters by providing physical and spiritual support through the promotion of a caring community.*

DART is prepared to deploy relief teams anywhere in the Southeast Conference and, if called upon, anywhere in any of the Conferences of the United Church of Christ. The group that has organized DART—Will Rabert, Diantha Brown, and Mike Wimer—is also organizing work camps in Micronesia and Hawaii, which have been scheduled for May and June of 2001.

Rekindle the Gift Program

The Advisory Board of the Rekindle the Gift program met January 21-22 (see article on page 7).

The Elizabeth Talmage Memorial Fund

A fund was set up to provide higher education to young women in East Alabama. This fund will be implemented over the course of this next year.

Stewardship and OCWM Commission

Truman Moore, Chair of the Commission on Stewardship and OCWM, has agreed to solicit missionaries to tour throughout the Southeast Conference, and to assist them in setting up their visits. The Commission is also promoting the concept of tithing congregations—that each congregation gives 10 percent of its budget to OCWM, as our new church starts are doing. The Commission is looking forward to representation from each of the four Associations at the Graham Cluster for Stewardship Education in May.

Women in Church and Society Commission

The Commission is promoting the National Women's Gathering to be held in Charlotte, N.C., in April.

Christian Education and Youth Commission

The Commission continues to promote the Resource Center, the Partners in Education Program, and Mini-Camp.

Christian Social Justice Commission

This Commission is developing a theme of Jubilee Year, and is eagerly promoting work camps and tours of Cuba.

Church Development and Evangelism Commission

It was reported that we are submitting grants to the Board for Homeland Ministries for three new church starts: a three-year grant for subsidy to help GSN Ministries in its continued development, and exploration grants for churches in Decatur, Ga., and Birmingham, Ala.

Speaking Out on Addiction

By Dorothy Gager

Some months ago, I wrote about the wonderful experience I had as a delegate to General Synod last summer. There was only one incident that was painful for me, and I want to share this concern with others in the Southeast Conference.

The setting for my ministry is the Vanderbilt Institute for Treatment of Addiction, an alcohol and drug treatment center connected to a major medical school. In my eight years here, I have had the privilege of ministering to individuals and families whose lives have been ravaged by the effects of addiction. In addition, I have been able to learn about current research into this problem and have come to understand addiction as a physical disease of the brain. It is no more a sign of moral weakness or lack of will-power than diabetes or any other chronic disease caused by chemical imbalances within the body.

At General Synod, a fine resolution was introduced about the need for members and congregations within the UCC to be educated about the biological bases of mental illnesses such as depression, schizophrenia, manic-depressive disease, phobias, etc. The resolution called, in addition, for advocacy so that insurance companies end their practice of setting lower coverage limits for these conditions. Many health insurance policies offer unlimited coverage for all conditions, except mental illness and addiction, for which there is a rather low limit on the number of hospital days or treatments covered.

I was very impressed with the wording of the resolution and the obvious amount of research and care involved in its preparation. Addiction was not among the conditions listed in the resolution, but I assumed that this was simply an oversight. I proposed what I thought was a "friendly amendment" to insert the word *addiction* in the list. It never occurred to me that people who had such an up-to-date understanding of mental illness would not have the same understanding of addiction. I was wrong! First the committee said it was not a "friendly" amendment, and then the delegates overwhelmingly rejected it.

During the remainder of General Synod, a number of people approached me to thank me for speaking out. They were people who were in recovery or who had family members or friends in recovery. They had not spoken in support of



Dorothy Gager at
General Synod

the amendment because of the stigma attached to addiction; they were afraid of what their fellow delegates would think of them if they knew that there was addiction in their family.

The disease of addiction affects people from all social and economic groups. It tends to run in families; people are born with the genetic predispo-

sition for the disease just as they are born with the genetic predisposition for diabetes, heart disease, or certain forms of cancer. It is estimated that up to 25% of all general hospital admissions are the direct or indirect result of alcohol or drug intoxication. Alcohol and drugs are often involved in domestic violence. The personal, social, and economic costs are staggering.

Addiction is a chronic, progressive, fatal disease; if not treated, it will lead to death. There is no cure, but there are good treatment methods available, even when addiction is coupled with some form of mental illness. When people are ashamed of the disease, they try to hide it and do not seek help until there are major crises. Those who understand it as a disease can seek appropriate help earlier in the process and can enter recovery before they have lost everything.

The church has for too long perpetuated false ideas about addiction that make alcoholics and addicts afraid to let pastors or members of the congregation know when they need help. As we educate ourselves, our congregations, our children, and our communities about this disease, we make it possible for addicts, alcoholics, and their families to see the church as an instrument of God's grace and healing. Now, too many of them see the church only as a place of condemnation and misunderstanding.

There are excellent resources for individuals and congregations, and I will see that information is available at the Southeast Conference Resource Room. If anyone would like more of the scientific information on the physical basis for addiction, I would be glad to send it to you. And I would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with anyone who is interested in working on a resolution for the next General Synod. Please contact me at **615-292-0934 (home); 615-327-7169 (work); or dorothy.h.gager@vanderbilt.edu (e-mail).**

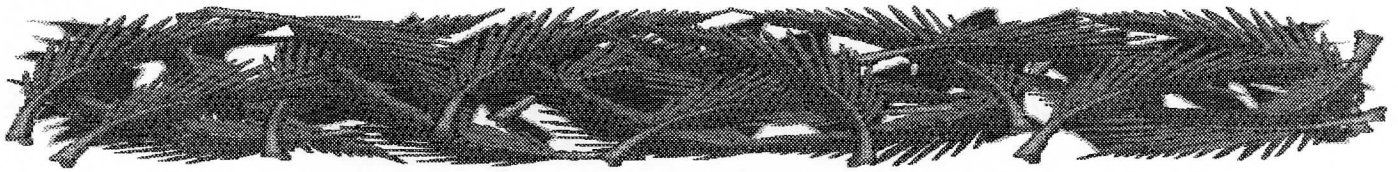
Building Vital Churches for the 21st Century

The established church increasingly seems to be losing ground in the United States. Almost all the mainline denominations, including the United Church of Christ, continue to decline in membership each year. How do we stem the tide and once again become a growing faith community?

The answer is complex, but it must begin with the local congregation. Clark Williamson and Ronald Allen, authors of *The Vital Church* (Chalice Press, 1998), closely studied several small, dying congregations as well as several that have turned things around. They discovered that strong, vital churches have a balance of good teaching, dynamic worship, a strong sense of community, and engagement in meaningful service. Churches without one or more of these components are in danger.

The Church Development and Evangelism Commission of the Southeast Conference believes that the United Church of Christ has much to offer society. But it needs to find more effective ways of communicating our gifts. It therefore encourages and assists churches in developing vital evangelistic and renewal strategies. Perhaps it can help your congregation. If you are interested, please contact me at fccmarietta@juno.com (e-mail), or phone 770-428-3125.

—Jerry Gladson
Chair, Church Development and Evangelism Commission

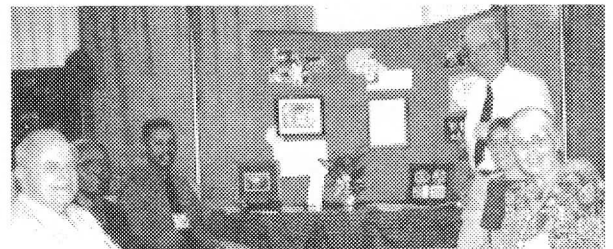


“Rekindle the Gift” Moving Forward

Just as the January 22 ice storm was bearing down on Atlanta, members of the Advisory Board for the Rekindle the Gift project met at Central Congregational UCC Church. Despite the weather outside, we shared heart-warming faith stories and rich worship in the fireplace room at the church. We came away feeling truly “rekindled” for the work ahead.

The first half of 2000 will be devoted to research, fund-raising, and hiring a director for the project. With a director on board, we hope to spend the summer planning pastoral visits to our AMA (American Missionary Association) congregations, which will begin in October. Between October 2000 and June 2001, we intend to visit our 18 AMA congregations, preaching, conducting Bible study, and gathering oral histories. July 2001 through June 2003 will be spent with follow-up strategies for leadership development and renewal, as well as the writing of a book and production of related resources. We hope to focus an upcoming Southeast Conference Annual Meeting on Rekindle the Gift.

The members of the Advisory Board—Jerome Gray, Milton Hurst, Annie Neal, Helen Washington, and Odessa Woolfolk—came from Montgomery, Talladega, Nashville, Savannah, and Birmingham, representing AMA churches and academic institutions. They offered a multitude of helpful suggestions and insights to Tim Downs, Joyce Hollyday, and Fay Walker (our grant writer). We hope to strengthen ties between our churches and academic institutions; to carry the AMA story back to the North; and to promote an inclusive vision of the church. The Board will meet again in the spring or summer at the Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham.



The Rekindle the Gift display was a gathering point at General Synod

Thank You!

Our OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission) giving in 1999 was almost \$20,000 over what was given in 1998. This shows an increase of more than 10% last year, \$7,000 over what we had budgeted. To all of you who gave so generously, thank you! Your dollars are helping us to expand the vision that is taking root here in the Southeast Conference, enabling us to continue providing quality staff, resources, and programming

Micronesia and Hawaii in 2001 *Join our Conference Work Camps*

The Southeast Conference is sponsoring two work camps in 2001: to Micronesia, on the island of Ponape, May 19-June 1, and to the islands of Hawaii, June 2-17. Will Rabert is in charge of recruiting, planning, and coordinating with the UCC personnel on the islands.

Will already has a foreman, a spiritual chaplain, and two persons in charge of volunteers. At present, more than 60 people are signed up, just by word of mouth. Priority will be given to 1) those on the Conference Disaster Relief Team and Conference staff; 2) those going to both sites for the entire four weeks; 3) persons with special skills needed for the work; 4) Uplands residents and other Conference members; 5) UCC colleagues from other conferences; and 6) people who are not members of the UCC.

At present, we do not know the precise type of work that will be required. But we know that we will be remodeling a former Ponape school into a seminary and working on a church camp, retreat center, and possibly some church buildings in Hawaii. Tentative airfare, as of today, is about \$600 per person for Hawaii, \$1,200 for Micronesia, and \$1,800 for both. We are working on securing free lodging and meals.

If you are interested, please contact **Will Rabert** to get on the list. Signing up now is only showing your interest. You can change your mind at any time up until the airfare is due, soon after January 2001. Will can be reached at **P.O. Box 607, Pleasant Hill, TN 38578-0607; (931) 277-5424; willmartha@juno.com**.

Southeast Conference Annual Meeting
June 16-17, 2000
Community Congregational United Church of Christ
Montgomery, Alabama

"Do justice...

Love kindness...

Walk humbly with God"

All are invited! Please let us know at the Conference Office who your church's delegates will be. Keep your eyes open for a special mailing with more details and registration information arriving soon.

Disaster Relief Team Needs Supply Preachers



The Southeast Conference Disaster Assistance Relief Team (DART) is compiling a list of persons who are willing to preach free of charge for pastors whose church buildings, congregations, or families have been affected by disaster. Some pastors wish to be in the pulpit during trying times. Others burn out or just need some R&R to rejuvenate themselves during or after a disaster. We want to be able to offer clergy or laypersons who are willing to preach, or to conduct liturgy, as needed. You may never be called by the DART committee, but we are looking to add new names to the list. If you are willing, able, and interested in this supportive ministry, contact **Will Rabert at P.O. Box 607, Pleasant Hill, TN 38578-0607; (931) 277-5424; willmartha@juno.com.**

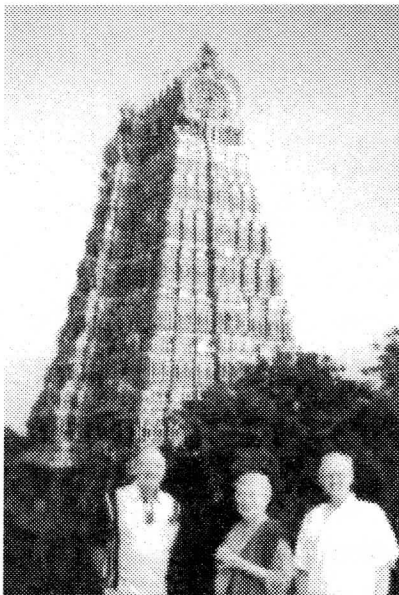
Members of DART are Will Rabert (Disaster Coordinator), Diantha Brown (Chair), Mike Wimer (Volunteer Coordinator), Lois King, Charlie Lord, and Ben Welch.

TRAVEL TO INDIA!

An invitation: Take a break and discover yourself in a place you may have only dreamed of—India. All arrangements will be made. A schedule filled with surprises will make this a trip with a difference.

Pleasant Hill residents Dick and Joyce Riesz spent 30 years living and working at American College in Madurai, South India, as missionaries for the United Church of Christ. Since their retirement, the college has made four requests that they return to their second homeland as leaders of study tours, with the sponsorship of the Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ.

The expeditions center on developing friendships with the people of the Indian sub-continent. Travelers gain intimate glimpses into homes, art, religion, and other dimensions of life in the State of Tamil Nadu. The faculty of American College assures visitors opportunities for world-class interactions as well as the pursuit of specialized interests.



SIP '06 pilgrims visit a Hindu temple.



Rev. Pat Robbenolt meets Indian children on a SIP pilgrimage.

Here is an experience not available to the average tourist. Fifteen Pleasant Hill residents have availed themselves of this opportunity. *Crossville (TN) Chronicle* theatre reviewer Rog Robbenolt and his wife, Pat Robbenolt, were a part of the '99 pilgrimage. Rog commented, "I developed the art of discovering human worth and essential grace beneath the surface of poverty. It was a life-enhancing experience for me." For Pat, being a part of the harvest ceremony of Pongal in an Indian home was a high point.

Our communities have not remained untouched. A *Chronicle* article lifted up two disabled young women in South India whose education in a computer program is being underwritten by the Crossville Noon Rotary Club. Dr. Riesz began this program during his years of service there.

The next trip to Madurai will be in **January 2001**. Details are available on the Internet at **www.sip2001.homestead.com/SIP2001.html** or by calling **Dick and Joyce Riesz at (931) 277-5642**. An extension is available to North India to visit Delhi, Agra and its Taj Mahal. Avail yourself of this personal "Passage to India."

FYI

Southeast Conference **Mini-camp 2000** has been cancelled. We hope to see all of our youth at the Southeast Conference Annual Meeting.

The United Church of Christ Support Staff Network invites all UCC office support staff from local churches, associations, conferences, and national agencies to attend its meeting April 28-30 in Cleveland. The meeting, whose theme is "A New Millennium: An Agenda for Change," is intended to create a network among support staff and raise awareness about their vital role and contributions to the church. Contact the Conference Office or sandy@mmsucc.org.

The **National Youth Event 2000** will take place in Ames, Iowa, July 6-10. This is an opportunity not to be missed for youth. Registration materials are available at the Conference Office.

The **National UCC Women's Meeting** will take place April 27-30 in Charlotte, N.C. The theme is "From Many Streams—a New River." Associate Conference Minister Joyce Hollyday will be offering a workshop at the event.

Evangelism Connections 2000 will be held March 31-April 1 in Pittsburgh; September 15-16 in Houston; and November 3-4 in St. Paul. Contact the Conference Office for more information.

Joyce Hollyday will be leading a retreat titled **Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: Writing Autobiography as Spiritual Journey** at Blowing Rock Assembly Grounds, a UCC retreat center in North Carolina, May 12-14. For more information, contact BRAG at 828-295-7813; guest@ucc-brag.org.

Covenant for Renewal Meeting Rescheduled

Spring is on the way, and the Southeast is happy to bid farewell to a winter of unexpected snow and unrelenting ice. Because of the weather, the Covenant for Renewal Meeting, scheduled for January 28, had to be cancelled. It has been rescheduled for **Thursday, March 16, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Chattanooga, Tenn.** We'll hope for sunshine.

Voices & Visions Wants Your Input

Please send your ideas, suggestions, and prayer requests for inclusion in the Conference newsletter to **Joyce Hollyday, P.O. Box 1627, Pisgah Forest, NC 28768; 800-442-1064. New e-mail address: jhollyday@citcom.net.**

Southeast Feast

Food for the Heart and Soul

By Joyce Hollyday



The third weekend in January, I was in San Antonio, Texas, meeting with a group of colleagues from around the country. We're working together on a book about spiritual practices for teenagers. Often during our time together, we spoke about living and dying well. We expressed our hopes that our book might be an invitation to young people to drink deeply from life's mysteries and God's grace.

When I landed back home at the Asheville airport Sunday evening, a friend whisked me off to the home of Mary and Mary Etta, and Mary's mother Anne, members of my spiritual community here in the mountains of North Carolina. Anne was in the final stages of her dying. Surrounding her bed were other community members and seven of her eight children. When I entered the candlelit room, Mary whispered to her, "Joyce is here. We're all here now." With that, Anne took three more breaths and was gone, ushered into glory by our prayers and singing.

We anointed and massaged her body, and dressed her in a fine gown. I pulled together a brief eulogy, and we spent a long time around the dining room table sharing memories, praying and laughing, hugging and weeping. And then—because Anne had insisted that we party when she died—we ordered out for pizza and told stories about her until almost Monday.

Anne's children, who came on a moment's notice from three corners of the country, had spent three days lovingly stroking her and singing hymns to her. They had placed cherished family photographs, mostly of her grandchildren, and other treasures by her bedside. They had taped her beloved prayer card of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane on one of the fan blades overhead, so that she could see Jesus as she was making her journey toward his welcoming arms. When Anne finally left us, resurrection was written on her face.

Anne had loved deeply, enfolding everyone she met into her circle of compassion and care. She understood well life's mysteries and God's grace. In her final months, Alzheimer's had begun to claim and change her. But at her heart, she clung to her love of God and the people around her. In this Lenten and Easter season, she reminds me that, whatever our suffering, resurrection waits on the other side.

SPRING

Clergy Retreat May 9-10

The spring clergy retreat promises to be an exciting time. **The Rev. Dr. David Greenhaw, President of Eden Theological Seminary**, will be our keynoter. We will gather for lunch at noon on Tuesday, May 9, and adjourn at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, May 10. The retreat will take place at Pilgrim Congregational United Church of Christ in Chattanooga, Tenn. Accommodations will be in the Chattanooga Choo Choo.

We are eager for a good showing at this retreat. The subject will be **"Do We Have a Church There? The Future of the Local Church in the United Church of Christ."** This will be a time to reflect upon the future of the UCC, its congregations, and its ministries. We will have opportunity for dialogue and discussion throughout the event. All clergy are urged to attend.

*I am the resurrection and the life.
Those who believe in me, even though
they die, will live, and everyone who
lives and believes in me will never die."*

—John 11:25-26



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